

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework and the Victorian Essential Learning Standards

Discussion Paper

12 December 2008

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This Discussion Paper was commissioned by the VCAA to support the development of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

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ISBN 978-1-921702-16-7

FRAMING THE ISSUES

There are compelling reasons for transforming the way in which early childhood education and care (ECEC) functions in contemporary society. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) thematic review of ECEC in 20 nations (OECD, 2006) signified the need for an integrated, collaborative and participatory approach to ECEC provision. Such a vision values and includes all children and families, growing strong links across services, professionals and parents at local level. Realising a consistent approach to children's learning facilitates the many transitions that young children encounter as they thrive, learn and grow. The reform process is a shared engagement between parents, families, communities and government.

The national and state context surrounding a Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

Public awareness of gaps in ECEC provision and insufficient quality in services has made ECEC a core part of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Productivity Agenda (COAG). A national quality framework has been developed, recognising both the importance of quality early childhood education and care and changing community needs. In Victoria, the *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* (2008) contains three planks of reform: partnerships with parents and communities, system development and reform, and workforce reform.

These national and state reform processes enshrine shared values and aspirations for young children in Australia. **An overarching learning agenda gives new purpose to all types of ECEC programs.** There is a strong focus on social inclusion to address the right of all families to be active participants and receive support in the care, education and upbringing of their children. A participatory process acknowledges family diversity and locality difference. Having common purpose and closing the gap in children's preparedness for formal education is a central aim. Recognition of the uniqueness of each child requires that programs encourage children's learning interests and enable their capacity for self-direction and advancement. The concept of integrated early childhood education and care heralds a new system where preschool, child care and early school services connect and strengthen

under unified purpose. The context of early learning as the foundation for human capital development requires optimal adult engagements with children from birth. As an outcome of this reform process it is intended that all children are secure, capable and motivated towards life-long learning and positive social relationships.

Existing differences in early childhood service focus and expectations

The Victorian ECEC system is transforming from services that are differentiated by basic function – child care, preschool, child health, early years primary – to **an integrated system that serves children, connects with families and works to a common purpose:** enhancing child outcomes both within and beyond ECEC settings (OECD, 2006). This evolutionary process is underway in order to improve the continuity of children's early experiences and to use resources in ways that are efficient and effective for every child's learning and development. Children's interests and needs are at the centre of an integrated system.

Whereas child care services may have been thought of as providing basic care primarily while parents are in the paid workforce, kindergarten services as providing early education and maternal and child health services as providing parenting advice and child health monitoring, **a transformed and integrated system has all services focused on the care, education and upbringing of every child.** The separate histories and traditions of these differentiated services have produced substantially different goals and work cultures, with separated policy, monitoring and accountability processes. Yet families should expect that their infants and young children are entitled to consistent quality and standards in all the available ECEC services. There is no evidence-based justifiable reason to separate care and education into separate services, funding or administrative arrangements. Children's health, emotional and social wellbeing and their intellectual development are the business of all ECEC programs. Optimal ECEC enables seamless transitions and improves continuity for children as they move through the environments of home, early childhood settings and school.

The scope and direction of the Victorian early childhood system

Conception to age eight years is the internationally recognised period of early childhood development.

A Victorian integrated system focuses on the period from birth to age eight. This gives a strong rationale for alignment between learning in early years services and the wider education system in order to achieve, over the first eight years of a child's life, **a gradual shift in emphasis from free play to structured learning in formal settings**. While the notion of stages of development is now widely debated, general principles for teaching and learning are needed to orientate ECEC professionals towards commonly agreed goals, strategies and modes of assessment related to changes in children's capacities and needs as they grow. An exemplar sketch of change in the focus of children's learning and development is

noted in Figure 1. The empirical evidence indicates that optimal support and encouragement across the learning continuum from infancy and toddlerhood, through preschool and into the early years of school is very important if both short-term and long-term gain is to be realised (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007). The gains are both wide and long, accruing to children, families and society. Seamless transitions are facilitated by commitment, in partnership with families, to common learning and teaching principles and an agreed early years learning and development framework (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008).

Figure 1: Exemplar changes in focus as children grow, develop and learn



The integrated ECEC agenda that frames early childhood learning and development will enable parents and professionals to engage about philosophy, approach and outcomes related to caring for and educating infants and young children. This agenda is a catalyst for renewal and improvement through active participation to support early childhood development and learning.

Raising professional capacity and adopting a philosophy of engagement

The extraordinary brain growth and neurological structuring that occurs in early childhood is impetus for significant attention being given to the ways adults and children engage with the very young (Couperus & Nelson, 2006; Blakemore & Frith, 2006). This recent evidence is behind the need to **raise the level and quality of ECEC provision** at this time, to support parenting and to adopt particular kinds of pedagogy in ECEC programs. The **ideal of 'adding value'** to the immediate and future learning of young children underpins the attention to all types of engagement with children.

During early childhood, the neurological processes that are occurring link emotion and cognition and

establish the 'make-up' of a child as a unique individual. According to the kinds of interactions and experiences that very young children have, they learn to regulate their behaviour, determine their sense of wellbeing and security and define their capacity to grow and learn (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). These dispositions can be set positively or negatively, having significant consequences into the future. Hence, it is important to maximise positive engagements with infants, toddlers and young children. *How* parents, siblings, family members, caregivers and teachers form relationships with the very young will determine a child's health, wellbeing and learning trajectory (Gerhardt, 2004; Ginsberg, 2007). There are life-time effects of early experience, with cumulative impact on later events and outcomes in the life cycle. For these reasons it is critical that ECEC professionals describe their philosophy and approach to parents and negotiate effective, evidence-based pathways to support optimal development and learning for every child.

ECEC professionals are a diverse group who have received widely differing types and levels of preparation for their roles in supporting early childhood development and learning. There is a need for change at all levels to realise the aspiration

of the Victorian *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform* (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008): children thriving in supportive homes and learning environments. Change at system, program and individual levels will be guided by the available empirical evidence base for effective ECEC. An orientation toward an integrated system; structural reform; an education concept, pedagogical process quality, operational quality, parent and community outreach and involvement, raised performance standards and child outcomes are all important features of a quality ECEC system. These features are articulated in *Starting Strong II* (OECD, 2006) and reflected in the Australian and Victorian reform agenda. They impel a rise in professional capacity and a strong philosophy of engagement. A participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance across ECEC provision reveals important features highlighted by the OECD review. Professionals are expected to:

- focus on learning processes and their mediation
- focus on values, including respect for diversity
- search for consistency across education environments and procedures to ensure smooth, inclusive transitions.

The value of learning in and through play

The value of early childhood development and learning is marked by its close association with play (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989). **Play in ECEC can be interpreted broadly** to include a way of learning that is child-directed, active and non rule-governed (Klugman & Smilansky, 1990; Rinaldi, 2006)). There are many terms used to describe play – free play, guided play, dramatic play, social play. All involve learning through action, imaginative and creative processing, and problem-solving. Through play-based experience children develop a ‘sense of self’ and they learn to inquire, empathise, communicate, collaborate and work with others (Ginsberg, 2007). Play is most effective as a learning modality when it is concrete, physical and interactive, involving people, materials, and environments. Homes, child care settings, kindergartens, preschools and schools are all places where children’s learning can be advanced through concrete, physical and interactive play experiences.

Play-based learning in ECEC can engage adults in varying ways. Different situations and settings predict different kinds of adult engagement, although shared understandings of the value of play in children’s learning aids the adoption of an overarching education vision for ECEC from birth to eight years. Play-based learning in homes, child care settings, kindergartens, preschools and schools allows a range of effective teaching and learning strategies to be applied (Wood, 2005). No matter the setting, experiences that are focused on children’s interests are at the core of effective early childhood education and care. Such experiences include high levels of adult engagement that is responsive to the unique learning capacities of each child.

Children’s interests and ideas are the drivers of effective ECEC programs which, in turn, are necessarily flexible and responsive. Such programs involve careful planning and resourcing that is sensitive to family values, educator values and accepted community standards for learning. Approaches that engage bodies, minds and spirits through multiple modes of learning (tactile, oral, visual, aural and bodily kinaesthetic) are thought to ensure optimal provision for children’s diverse early learning and development (Wright, 2003a; Armstrong, 2000).

Life-long learning: Growing engagement in learning over time

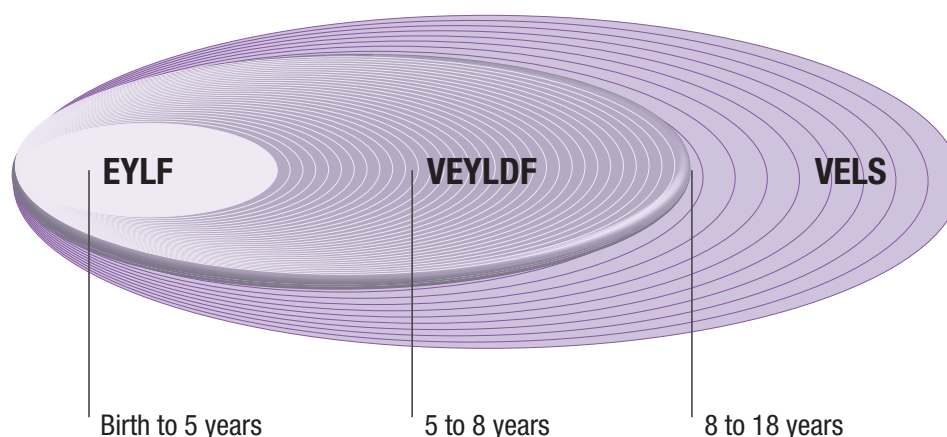
As children grow and as programs formalise, both parents and teachers need to find **a balance between child-led and adult-directed strategies** to support optimal learning outcomes, including ongoing motivation by a child to be attentive, inquiring, confident, and disposed toward ongoing learning. Reflecting the values of the national draft *Early Years Learning Framework* (Edwards, Flear & Nuttall, 2008) children’s learning is enabled through principles of learning and teaching that build on a capacity to learn through play. Learning and teaching principles need to be sensitive to relationships, optimise a learning environment, foster creativity and recognise that transitions imply change and adjustment (Tayler, 1999). A multi-dimensional teaching and learning framework is therefore necessary to promote continuity and excellence in early years learning and development, including within the early years of school.

SETTING THE DIRECTION FOR A VICTORIAN FRAMEWORK

The purposes set out in the national draft *Early Years Learning Framework* (Edwards et al., 2008) are expanded and articulated for the Victorian context through the drafting of a *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Frame* (VEYLDF). This is to **accommodate Victoria's universal services model and to unite ECEC services** under common purpose.

The Victorian system values a focus on conception to age eight of early childhood education and care. To further the development of an integrated system it is timely to plan a VEYLDF that not only unites ECEC services but also achieves greater linkage between early childhood and the early years of school. **The VEYLDF orients towards pedagogy** to facilitate professional and parental thinking on optimal ways to support children's learning and development. Seamless transitions are important as young children grow and advance. Figure 2 illustrates the place of a VEYLDF in the broader education system: it is the bridge between the national *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) (0–5 years) and the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* (VELs).

Figure 2: Learning and development continuum



A VEYLDF should assist Victorian families and early childhood services professionals to realise, at local level, the vision for early childhood care, education and upbringing laid out in the national EYLF. A VEYLDF should help ECEC programs to project positively towards the formal school phase of education. The experiences and curriculum that are planned at local level for infants, toddlers and young children will vary according to the age of the child and the learning setting in consideration (home, centre, preschool, prep, early primary school class). At the same time, a VEYLDF will assist the formal school sector to engage with ECEC and adjust early school practices concurrently in the interests of building smooth, inclusive transitions in learning for all children.

Early learning and development and essential learning (VELs) in formal education: some connections

The VELs (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2000) <<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au>> introduce three core learning strands: *physical, personal and social learning*; *interdisciplinary learning* and *discipline-based learning*. Both **physical, personal and social learning, and interdisciplinary learning are reflective of the historical routes of early childhood pedagogy**. Early childhood programs have long advocated for cross-disciplinary and integrated learning, the development of generic learning skills and whole-child education. Similarly, the Principles of Learning and Teaching promoted in the Victorian

Education System (see *Blueprint*) emphasise a culture of value and respect for individuals, and importantly, a child- (or student-) centred approach to learning and teaching. This emphasis on *personalised learning* is clearly divergent from traditional discipline content-focused and teacher-directed approaches that historically have been associated with primary and secondary education. The apparent convergence by primary and early childhood education on *personalised learning* provides significant opportunity to create a seamless connection in children's learning from birth to eight years (Rodd, 2006; Keamy, Nicholas, Mahar, Herrick, 2007).

The VELS (VCAA, 2000) recognise that **learning occurs along a continuum** and that different children (students) progress their learning at different rates. The first stage of the VELS, crucial to a VEYLDF, concerns children in Prep through to Year 4 (laying the foundations). This stage focuses largely on developing the fundamental knowledge, skills and behaviours in literacy and numeracy and basic physical and social capacities which underpin all future learning. As families and professionals in ECEC services consider their practices in light of a VEYLDF, the essential learning standards set for Victorian children (students) can provide a point of projection and can support cohesion in development and learning across the age span.

A multi-dimensional teaching and learning framework

A VEYLDF is a trigger to promote parents' and professionals' discussions on how young children learn, what they need to learn, what their learning

looks like and how best to promote and track children's learning. Because play is a strong context for young children's learning the proposed VEYLDF adopts a **pedagogical base to frame child learning and development**. This base highlights pathways for parents and professionals to engage with infants, toddlers and young children. The pathways reflect a play base for children's development and learning. As parents and professionals apply the VEYLDF and consider their part in children's learning and development they will differentiate forms of teaching and learning that are relevant to different ages and levels in children's learning and development.

Concurrently, **child-directed learning, guided learning and adult-led learning** each play a part in a young child's early life trajectory. Infants and toddlers engage in their own playful explorations, they take part in shared interactions with parents, care-givers and teachers (e.g. through conversations, rhymes and games) and they are directly led by adults to learn self management (e.g. in toilet-training, dressing). Preschoolers and young children in the early years of school engage in their own forms of imaginative and rule-based play, they take part in guided learning (e.g. how to share, be tolerant of others and to listen) and they engage in adult-led learning in rich play-based contexts (e.g. written language/s, mathematical concepts and processes). The relative weighting of child-led, guided and adult-led learning varies with context and purpose. It is important, however, that all young children experience rich play-based experience through the early childhood phase of life. Child-directed, guided and adult-led play are intertwined throughout the life phase from birth to age eight, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: EYLDF Teaching and Learning Pathways

Child-directed play and learning
Guided play and learning
Adult-led play and learning



A multi-dimensional framework for learning addresses child-directed play, guided play and teacher-led learning. Table 1 draws on these learning pathways to illustrate ways that professionals interact with and support children's learning. Early childhood professionals adopt child-centred, guided and teacher directed pedagogies to support open and intentional learning outcomes. In Table 1 ways of teaching, setting learning environments, viewing what child

learning looks like, linking EYLF/VELS outcomes, and tracking and assessing learning are represented for parent and professional discussion and reflection. The content of the table is illustrative only. It is not a complete presentation of learning behaviours, strategies or ways of following children's learning. Such matters are developed locally and are specific to the children and families with whom professionals engage.

QUESTIONS

How can the VELs inform the development of the VELDF?

What is the balance between adult-led learning, child-directed play and guided play that is developed in response to children's interests?

Does this balance need to change depending on children's phases of learning and development?

Table 1: Towards a multi-dimensional framing of *Early Years Learning and Development*¹

| Ways of teaching | | Learning environments | Illustrative child behaviours (physical/motor, social/affective, and cognitive) | EYLF outcomes ² VELS ³ | Tracking and assessing children's learning |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|
| Child-directed play and learning | Interpret Provide Design Monitor Observe | Welcoming Safe Sensory-rich Flexible Individual-focused Capacity for free-form groups | Playful Exploratory Spontaneous Open-ended | Identity and relationships ² Multi-literacies ² Investigating and thinking ² Democratic and active participation ² Physical wellbeing and health ² Physical, personal and social learning ³ Interdisciplinary learning ³ Discipline-based learning ³ | Individual observations Parent and teacher reports Developmental checks Self assessments Photographic records Notated learning products |
| Guided play and learning | Co-construct Facilitate Scaffold Interact Collaborate Give feedback Encourage | Interactive Inclusive Aesthetically stimulating Flexible Interest-based Concept-rich Experiential | Negotiated Collaborative Emergent Enquiry-based | EYLF outcomes ² (as above) VELS ³ (as above) | Learning Stories Pedagogical documentation (photos/journals/diagnostics) Peer assessments Adult evaluations of knowledge, skills understandings, dispositions |
| Adult or 'more knowledgeable other'-led learning (Teaching) | Direct, Include Engage, respond Sequence Practice Challenge Model, Praise | Motivating Organised Inclusive Group-focused Planned Challenging | Receptive Intentional Convention-based Practised | EYLF Outcomes ² (as above) VELS ³ (as above) | Recorded group discussions Learning products/artefacts Criterion referenced evidence of learning Teacher evaluation of knowledge, skills understandings, dispositions |

Note:

1. This table is illustrative only. It is not a complete rendition of learning and teaching as it applies to ECEC from birth to age eight
2. National Early Years Learning Framework DRAFT November 2008 For the Final (2009) Framework, see: http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFramework.aspx
3. Victorian Essential Learning Standards Overview: <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/>

Four key understandings guided the development and interpretation of the proposed VEYLDF:

1. Creative learning environments shape children's outcomes.
2. Teaching and learning are active, responsive and cyclic processes.
3. Learning is enhanced through collaborative partnerships.
4. Tracking and assessing learning is an individual and collective process.

Building creative learning environments

Creativity is enhanced through the provision of stimulating learning environments (interactions, materials, resources and spaces) (Wright, 2003b). An inquiry-based approach encourages independent and collaborative learning, experiential processing and reflective thought (Wallace, 2002). Inquiry engages children and adults (parents or professionals) in a creative learning process that supports the investigation of real life questions. The setting of hypotheses and the generation of conclusions based on evidence is at the heart of effective early childhood education programs. Throughout the process the child is the protagonist of his/her own inquiry, is actively engaged in determining answers to questions or resolving doubt while the adult facilitates this process by asking open-ended and probing questions (Edwards, 1998).

Project-based learning is centred on group inquiry that is in-depth, collaborative and investigative, with topics emerging from culturally valued knowledge and the interests of children, families and teachers. Teachers identify rich topics that have the potential for engagement and deep learning and are suitable for exploration across a variety of learning areas. The creative learning process involves perception, investigation, multi-symbolic representation including narrative, and reflection. Children are encouraged to identify questions, solve problems, consider and reconsider ideas, represent and re-represent understandings and draw conclusions. Outcomes of this type of learning are the creation of new knowledge, an enhanced capacity for creative thinking and learning, and the capacity to contribute as a member of a group (Edwards, 1998).

In order to promote play and learning, **environments need to be engaging, responsive and stimulating**. Planned indoor and outdoor spaces need to cater for a variety of social and physical activities, privacy, small and large group activity, and include materials that are flexible and easy to manipulate

(Helm & Katz, 2001). Aesthetically stimulating spaces linked with the natural world and the world of technology enable print-rich, concept-rich, sensory-rich and culturally-rich environments to shape learning outcomes. Learning environments, when carefully planned, support education for sustainable development.

QUESTIONS

What are the characteristics of an effective learning environment?

How does the design of the learning environment reflect different levels of learning and development from birth to eight years?

Teaching and learning – active, responsive and cyclic

To foster learning **parents and professionals need to model their own passion for learning**, adopting a range of roles including carer, facilitator, guide and manager. In the context of a play-based curriculum, teachers need to act on the spontaneous teachable moments and scaffold children's learning. In effect parents and professionals need to judge when to intervene, when to enter play (play is an event and a process) when to stand back and when to direct learning. These interventions in children's play promote different forms of learning including helping children to develop positive attitudes and dispositions to self, others and the environment.

Effective teaching includes the **scaffolding and co-construction of knowledge** in order to stimulate children's concept and skill development (Goldstein, 1999). Professionals engage with children to support focused inquiry and decision-making. Empirical evidence points to teachers taking a more active role in children's learning through focused observation and listening, constructive and informative feedback, provocative questioning and supportive communication. The goal of all early childhood teachers must be to enrich play through guided teaching that introduces children to new possibilities and encourages the development of creative and sustained shared thinking. Ultimately, both the early childhood and early years of primary teacher needs to balance intentional teaching and the direct transmission of knowledge with opportunities for children to engage in the environment on their own terms and to experience freedom of mind.

QUESTIONS

How is play defined and what is the role of the adult in facilitating or guiding play?

How do parents and teachers obtain evidence of learning through play?

How do teachers plan for emergent curriculum content?

Enhancing learning through collaborative partnerships

Parents are the first and primary educators of children. The patterns of engagement that are built between parents, caregivers, teachers and others engaged in children's learning and development experiences become important hallmarks of cohesion or disunity in approach. These kinds of engagement affect a child's development and learning. To ensure optimal advancement for any child shared values and understandings about the outcomes being sought, respect for and acknowledgment of the roles of parents and professionals and constructive partnerships are important.

The bridge to school-based learning

Up until now in Victoria early childhood practitioners have not been required to attend to pre-determined curriculum standards or goals. The focus of early learning programs has centred on health, wellbeing, and learning to learn, with less emphasis given to the acquisition of discipline-based knowledge and skills. Discipline-based knowledge may be seen as 'academic curriculum' which is argued to be different from and less effective than play-based curriculum. Aligned with this belief is a fear of the *push-down curriculum*, one that leads to an over concentration on formal teaching. To avoid this imbalance, an articulation of agreed learning and development outcomes does not translate into an inflexible one-size-fits-all syllabus. Common learning outcomes should combine with scope for self-determined context-based learning goals.

There exists a need to **examine the way different learning frameworks for young children influence learning outcomes** as children progress through school. A summary of other state curriculum

guidelines indicates that documents addressing ECEC, preparatory or early primary need to provide professionals with explicit support and clarity on what should be encouraged, while also encouraging teachers to make professional judgments about when to introduce content, taking into account the interests and the development needs of children. For example, the *Queensland Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006) outlines a continuum of learning including becoming aware, exploring, making connections and applying.

Evidence suggests that young children who experience curriculum approaches that support simplified de-contextualised skills-based learning fail to develop the skills of comprehension needed to support high quality engagement in later years of schooling (Donaldson, 1986; Tizard & Hughes, 2002). In the area of literacy development this problem has been characterised as *the fourth-grade slump* (Chall & Jacobs, 2003). In this example, young readers who have been drilled in the skills of decoding print, begin to fail to make the transition to reading more complex texts, at the fourth grade level, due to their inability to make sense of what they are reading. The curriculum **frameworks for early childhood and school need to embrace pedagogies that value and develop children's interests and knowledge**, supporting deep learning as well as the necessary skill base.

The VEYLDF will need to help professionals **articulate a well informed pedagogy** to support children's development of the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the environments they encounter within and beyond classrooms. There are many ways to apply the VEYLDF in the diverse contexts in which children learn and develop. There is a need to track the impact of different curriculum and teaching approaches on children's outcomes and future progress. School-based examples of effective early learning will be important hallmarks of the success of an integrated ECEC system.

QUESTION

What support, training and professional development do adults need to enhance children's learning through collaborative partnerships?

Tracking and assessing learning

In ECEC programs, professionals play a key part in tracking children's development and learning. The **cyclical process** of planning and designing for learning, implementing plans, engaging in activities,

reviewing and reporting children's progress is at the heart of supporting children's development and learning (Tayler, 2000). Whether the child her/himself, a parent, a caregiver or a teacher, it is instructive to track experiences, reflect on the purpose for using materials/considering phenomena, and determine what is learned. Whether at home, in a centre, a public space or a school, a child's learning and development is ongoing. A cycle of planning, design, application and review can be applied (see Figure 4).

Children can be observed as playful, having priorities and expectations of situations and phenomena. Hence, **assessment begins with perceptive observations of children**. The goal of assessment is to monitor and document children's emerging skills, interests and dispositions as they engage in everyday activities and set tasks. Through monitoring and documentation children's learning is made visible. Planning to support and advance learning can, as a result, be nuanced and differentiated to suit the interests and rapidly advancing capacities of each child or group.

A focus on children's learning and development needs to **emphasise children's strengths**. Though this does not mean overlooking delays or health and wellbeing issues, it does mean looking beyond these to describe children's emerging abilities (thresholds of performance and knowledge) in order to plan new teaching and learning experiences. This model of planning flows from the assessment of individuals or small groups of children in the context of working or playing together.

A range of strategies and tools are needed to record evidence of diverse learning preferences and the kinds and layers of learning. Strategies may be formative, summative and/or diagnostic (Snow & Van Hemel, 2008). Systematic observation, journal notes, anecdotal records, checklist completions, child portfolios (work samples) and competency tests each have a place in gathering a suite of evidence about learning and development. When used in combination varied tools provide a comprehensive yet diverse evidence-base from which to make inferences about child understandings, development and learning. Varied strategies and tools enable the triangulation

of evidence from different perspectives or different observers and cohesive, justifiable inferences and judgments.

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation enable progress. Children shape their own learning and capacity to monitor their own progress. They form views about themselves, their capacities and potential in light of feedback received through daily interactions. Views about 'self as learner' have significant impact on children's ongoing progress. Parents observe and evaluate their child's progress, ideally liaising with professionals across services to ensure optimal support of their child. Health professionals track the wellbeing of parents and children giving advice and direction on what might be done next according to the findings of monitoring and evaluation. Early years teachers set goals that are drawn from commonly-agreed learning and development outcomes, ideally having negotiated these with families. Monitoring and evaluation strategies help direct the level and type of engagement teachers initiate in order to best support children's progress.

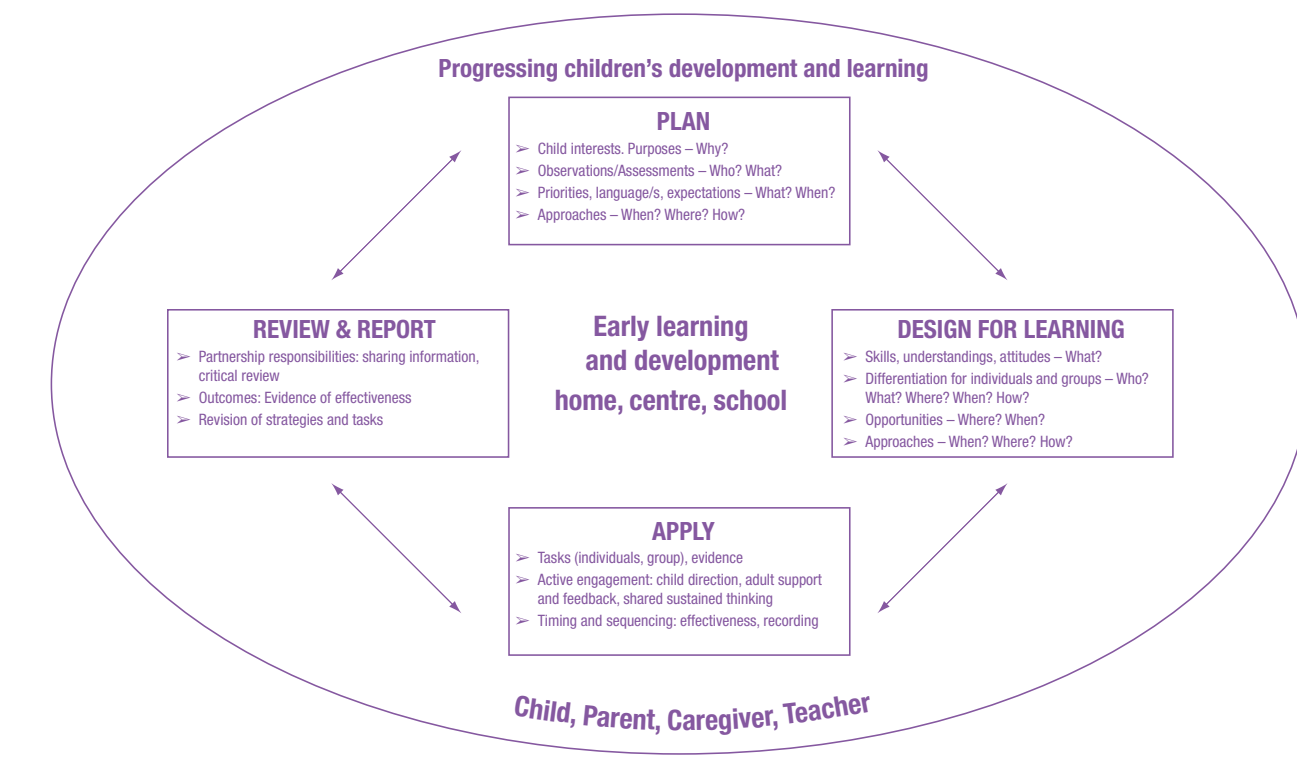
Documentation of development and learning varies according to professional focus and interest. Normally, professional reports or portfolios of development and learning are reported back to children and their families. Such material may be in the form of photographs, data on growth and development, transcribed comments and learning products. It **serves children, families and professionals** to reflect revise and reinvent. In doing so, it provides ongoing and formative evaluation that advises the next cycle in learning. A challenge for professionals is to map, plan for, guide and evaluate common learning across a group and at the same time have the skills and flexibility to adapt teaching to the emergent interests of individual children.

QUESTIONS

What evidence of development and learning will most support ongoing planning?

How can individual and group projects serve in the assessment of children's learning?

FIGURE 4: The cycle of progressing development and learning



Resources and professional development to support implementation

Application of the VEYLDF needs to recognise that **children, families and teachers bring substantial knowledge, skills, values and perspectives** that will drive how the framework is interpreted in practice. The VEYLDF therefore considers parents as partners in their children's development and learning, including providing information on how families can assist children's learning. There is a need to develop and publish material that supports schools and early childhood services to engage parents.

Professional training and resources are necessary whenever system-wide change is planned. The proposed VEYLDF should serve as focus material to enable deep discussion and debate among parents, caregivers, and teachers in local settings. The culture, context and content of children's learning is negotiated among parents, professionals and the community in light of the agreed outcomes presented in the national draft *Early Years Learning Framework*.

A wide base of experience and education is evident among ECEC professionals. Certification for professional practice in the varied ECEC settings exists through a mix of graduate and/or undergraduate degree qualifications, diplomas, certificates, and traineeships, having regard to licens-

ing and registration requirements. In some settings no formal qualifications are held by the staff in licensed services. Hence **a clear professional training and community learning strategy is necessary** to ensure that:

- reflection and review of the concepts underpinning the ECEC reform agenda is facilitated and supported by evidence
- feedback from widespread discussion and experimentation is formalised
- documents that are developed in light of parental and professional engagement are reviewed and evaluated against effectiveness evidence and the purposes for which they were designed
- professional training and development involves staff from across settings to engage together and come to understand the range of perspectives that exist around early childhood program provision (birth to age eight)
- differentiated professional development is also provided to increase the capacity of early childhood workers who have limited or no formal qualifications. (The surrounding leadership and mentorship processes will be critical for successful engagement and development)
- resources are developed to further assist parents, caregivers, early childhood and primary teachers to build and refine differentiated and effective early childhood pedagogies and to track and assess young children's progress and outcomes.

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